

I'd like to hear from you

Please contact me with your questions and concerns regarding legislative matters. Also, if you are having problems in your dealings with state government agencies, I may be able to help you. It's an honor to serve you, as well as represent you in Olympia.

Rep. Barry Sehlin

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Rep. Sehlin will serve once again as lead budget negotiator for Republicans in the House. Sehlin says the House GOP priorities are to protect services for vulnerable citizens while controlling overall spending to sustain the budget without the need for new taxes.



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2002 Session Report

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2002 Session Report

10th District

January 2002


Dear friends,

In a year normally set aside for mid-stream adjustments in policy and spending, lawmakers will be grappling with enormous challenges during the 2002 legislative session. We will be looking for ways to stimulate our economy and put families back to work. We hope to address the critical needs of our state's transportation system. And we must bring our \$22.8 billion state operating budget back into balance.

The results of two special legislative elections in November have given Democrats control of both the House and Senate, along with the governor's office. That means one party will be largely responsible for controlling the movement of bills and chairing key committees. But it will be up to all lawmakers to work toward responsible, long-term solutions to the budget and other issues affecting the families in our state.

This newsletter outlines some of the key issues we'll be addressing and I hope they'll be resolved. If you have questions or thoughts, I hope you'll make it a point to contact me. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,


Barry Sehlin
State Representative

Balancing the budget

With the recession taking its toll on state revenues, we currently face a \$1.2 billion shortfall in the state operating budget. As we address this budget challenge, lawmakers must remember that Washington families are also facing challenges. The easy solution would be to simply raise taxes. But that would be exactly the wrong answer. I don't think we should ask families to pay more when many are worried about losing their jobs.

Governor's budget protects state employees instead of vulnerable citizens

The first proposal for correcting the budget shortfall was offered by the governor last month. It calls for cuts to disabled citizens, nursing homes, and pharmacists who provide prescription drugs to low-income citizens on Medicaid. It would also raise taxes by \$100 million.

But the most discouraging thing about the governor's proposal is what it doesn't do: It fails to make a serious attempt to reduce the number of state employees. It calls for a net reduction of just 440 employees (less than one half of 1 percent of the 99,300 state FTEs). And, in fact, it provides a pay raise for state employees in September.

In my opinion, the governor's priorities are backwards. We should be looking for ways to cut bureaucracy with the least amount of impact on front-line services for those in need. Instead, the governor's plan protects state employees at the expense of the needy and working families.

Lawmakers will be working through this budget in the coming months, and I hope we take a more responsible approach. The state should do what working families do when they fall on tough times – establish priorities, control spending and pay for essential needs.

The bottom line is the governor's budget plan still spends over a billion dollars more than we'll collect in revenue this biennium. If we want to correct this problem, there's simply no substitute for living within our means.

Governor's Budget Proposal

An Overview

Total Revenues:	\$21.374 billion
Total Expenditures:	\$22.530 billion
Difference:	-\$1.156 billion
Ending fund balance:	\$0
Emergency Reserves balance:	\$303 million

Tax Increases

3% liquor tax – \$4.7 million
10% gambling tax – \$73.7 million
Use tax on shipping – \$20 million
Hydraulic project fees – \$4.3 million
Hunting and fishing license increase – \$1 million

Key Budget Cuts

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| • \$35 million for nursing homes | • \$31 million for state assistance for the disabled |
| • \$54 million for higher education | • \$14 million in block grants to K-12 schools |
| • \$34 million for Medicaid reimbursements for prescription drugs | |

Improving transportation: Keeping highways safe and people and products moving

The Legislature will go back to the drawing board this session to try to solve the state's transportation needs. Negotiations on a funding plan broke down over the summer, leaving some critical projects throughout the state without funding.

The governor has dusted off the same plan rejected by lawmakers last year, which includes the following tax increases:

- 9-cent gas tax increase
- 12-cent increase on diesel
- Increased sales tax on car purchases
- Increased weight fees on trucks and RVs
- \$50 license registration fee

A majority of lawmakers did not support this plan last time it came before us. Some felt the tax increase was more than families could afford, and many others insisted that voters should have the final say.

We know what the objections are. What's needed now is collaboration. We should attempt to bring together people from both parties to solve this statewide issue. I remain hopeful that bipartisan negotiations will produce a plan that the citizens of this state will support to solve our very serious transportation challenges.



Providing jobs for Washington families

During these tough economic times, it's as important as ever to make certain we have an economic climate that is prosperous and keeps people employed. While we have focused a great deal on tax reforms that make Washington a better place to do business, there are still improvements to be made in our regulatory climate, which is just as important to attracting jobs to our communities.

I will be supporting legislation to streamline permitting and provide better coordination between state agencies that regulate employers, so that people who provide jobs can have predictability, better cooperation and less regulatory costs when doing business in our state.



Are we rural or not?

The question of whether Island County is rural may be one of semantics. But it is an important question nonetheless. That's because counties that have a rural designation qualify for assistance to help plan growth and build infrastructure that is important to economic development. Rep. Kelly Barlean and I sponsored legislation last year that would give Island County a rural designation.

Unfortunately an agreement on the bill could not be reached last session. Still, I was pleased to hear legislative leaders from both parties express support for our proposal, and I am hopeful it will pass during the 2002 session.

